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Three Generations of Italians

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# Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Angelina Iafrate by Cynthia Nanni

Angelina Iafrate

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**COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS**

**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE** Angelina Iafrate

**INTERVIEWER** Cynthia Nanni

**DATE OF INTERVIEW** 2/79

**SUBJECTS COVERED**

Life in Italy

Work on family farm

Trip to America

Employment

Marriage

Role of husband, wife

Traditions

Prejudice

Oral History Interview

with

Angelina Iafrate

February 1979  
Interviewee's Home

by Cynthia Nanni

INTERVIEWER: What was your life in Italy? What do you remember about your life in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: My life? I worked in the farms.

INTERVIEWER: Who worked with you? How many were there in your family?

INTERVIEWEE: There were nine in my family. I have six brothers and three sisters.

INTERVIEWER: Who worked in your family?

INTERVIEWEE: WE all worked in Italy. Now brothers and sisters live over there. I came over here when I was eighteen years old. My mother brought me over to Italy when I was fourteen months old. Then I come back over here when I was eighteen years.

Interviewer: When you lived in Italy, who worked?

INTERVIEWEE: When we were in Italy we had to work. My father was in World War I. My mother had nine children and I was the oldest so I had to work. I had to work all day in the farms.

INTERVIEWER: Then your father was not home with your family.

INTERVIEWEE: No. My father was two years in the army. My mother with the nine children, I was the oldest so I had to go to work to support the family.

INTERVIEWER: Who else worked besides you? Did your mother work at all?

INTERVIEWEE: No. My mother had small children. I have a brother. I am 76, my brother 74, my sister 71, every two years my mother had a baby.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of your brothers help.

INTERVIEWEE: One of my brothers and then my sister started to work on the farm. We go in the woods and pick up the chestnuts. For three months we pick up chestnuts every day.

INTERVIEWER: Did you sell them after?

INTERVIEWEE: No, we work for somebody else. Over there somebody own a big place with all the chestnut trees. Then he open it up in the July when the chestnuts grow, and we have to pick them up. We put them the baskets we had. After the men come with the pony. We put them in the bags on top of the ponies and then they go to the place where the trains are. Then they deliver them all over. We also picked corn, strings beans, potatoes, tomatoes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a garden in your back yard?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we plant gardens in our back yards. We plant tomatoes, squash, beans, all the different vegetables. We had a lot of land around my house in Italy.

INTERVIEWER: What was your house like in Italy? Who lived with you in your house?

INTERVIEWEE: No. Only my mother and my grandmother and the children. We had four rooms. My mother's mother lived with us. Her husband died and she lived all alone, so she lived with us. When I

came over here, my mother was alive and my grandmother was alive. After six years of me being over here, my grandmother passed away. Then, three after my grandmother, my mother passed away too.

INTERVIEWER: Was your family close in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we were close.

INTERVIEWER: What did you like about Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: I went to Roma, Milano, Venezia, Napoli, Caserta, which was my home town. I have a sister in Napoli. I stayed over there three nights and days at her house.

INTERVIEWER: That was when you went back now.

INTERVIEWEE: I went back now and I also went back six years ago. There were two hundred and twenty people on the plane. We went with a group.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember when you were young in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: Most of the time I was on the farm.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about the customs?

INTERVIEWEE: We roll our own bread, we grow up our own chicken, rooster. We grew a pig, one we kill and make the home made meat, and the other sold to make the money. We had to work, work, work all the time.

INTERVIEWER: What didn't you like about Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: When I got big, I didn't understand why I was there when I was born here (America). I say to my father I want to go to America because I was born here. So, I wasn't going to work anymore. My father had over here one brother, and three sisters. And father's brother sent me the money. He had to go the church on Charles St. to get my baptism papers. He also had to the city hall and my papers to send to me in Italy.

When I come over here, all of uncles spent money for me to get here. So, I worked two years before I marry. I give all the money back.

It cost \$2,000.00 for my uncle to pay for me to get here by boat. I stay on the boat for fourteen days and fourteen nights. Because I was born here I wanted to come back. Once I heard my father reading a letter from his brother and I started to understand. I say me born there, tell my uncle I want to go there. My father write back to his brother and said that I wanted to come but I needed the money. So my uncle had two kids, one daughter and one son. My cousin is a priest. His name is Anthony DeAngelis and he is a very high priest. Only my father's sister is alive, she is eightyfive years. But, I lived with my father's brother's house for two years. After two years, I met my first husband. Albina, a friend whom I worked with, introduced me to her cousin. Who would know that when she die, I would marry her husband. All the trouble I pass.

INTERVIEWER: What made you come all by yourself? Weren't you afraid?

INTERVIEWEE: No. I remember everything. The boat's name was Pdria Copani di Francese. All the men, the cooks even were French people.

INTERVIEWER: What were the sleeping quarters like?

INTERVIEWEE: We sleep like in the hospital; one bed side by side, on top of one another. All the ladies on one side and the men on the other. If you were husband and wife, then the wife sleep on the upper, and the husband sleep on the lower.

But when the part come to deep water, the boat rocked back and forth. The water come into the bed where I sleep near the window. I was scared. I had the cop come. The cops come, then

nuns, preists, the church, and the show all came on the boat. So, the cop came and covered the window with some plastic. The rough part was only a few hours. When we pass the bad part, we call it the ? (chillbeterra). Over there that is the bad, bad, place.

My father's brother's wife's brother came over with me. I couldn't come all by myself because I wasn't twenty yet. I needed somebody to care for me. He had to sign for me.

INTERVIEWER: Did you meet any friends while you traveled?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I met a lot of friends. We all go eat in a big hall. We eat in morning 9:00, 12:30, and 5:00 at night.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get sick on the boat?

INTERVIEWEE: No. Everybody was getting sick but I get nothing.

INTERVIEWER: How did your family react to your leaving Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: They was over here before so they know what it was like. They were over here for five years but then my father got sick. The doctor said he had to go back to Italy for his health. But my parents marry over here. They have two daughters here. The first daughter got sick and died. Then I was born. After fourteen months, we move back to Italy.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you would ever want to live in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: I like to visit my brothers and sisters there. But, now, all my children are here. I don't want to leave them.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you arrive on the boat when you were young?

INTERVIEWEE: We arrived in Brooklyn , New York. We got off the boat and got on a train.

INTERVIEWER: How did you know what train to take?

INTERVIEWEE: My aunt's brother showed me. He knew the way because he travelled back and forth before. His parents brought him here when he was six. He was brought up in Brooklyn, New York. He

understood English, French,<sup>and</sup> Italian.

INTERVIEWER: What was the biggest problem when you arrived in New York?

INTERVIEWEE: No problem because when you get off the boat and you don't speak American, they give you somebody who speaks Italian. When I get off, I was a citizen so I got special privileges for me. I have two guides. One had my arm and the other carried my suitcases. Then they took me to the depot to get my ticket. I didn't know how to do that because I didn't speak American. The boy who brought me over spoke for me. From New York I arrived to Providence.

When we arrived in Providence, my uncle and two aunts all wait for me in the depot.

INTERVIEWER: Had you ever met your aunts and uncle?

INTERVIEWEE: No, I was too small. They recognized me because I was with my uncle's wife's brother.

INTERVIEWER: What did you expect America to be like?

INTERVIEWEE: My mother and father figured it was a big country and I could work in the factories and make the money. My parents told me everything about America. They said I would like it over there because you were born, and you have your aunt, uncle, and a lot of people. My mother's side had relatives there. She had a sisters. My father's mother lived here but died two years before I came.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of your initial feelings when you came here?

INTERVIEWEE: I liked it right away because I had family here. They liked me and I liked them from the start. I felt a little bad at the start because we weren't used to working in the factories all day long in Italy. Over here, they worked in closed buildings, ten hours a day. In Italy, we worked outside in the farm. After a while I started to like over here.



INTERVIEWER: Would nationality do you consider yourself, American or Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: I was born over here so I am an American. I am a citizen.

INTERVIEWER: What is the one most thing you treasure the most? Money, marriage?

INTERVIEWEE: It's important because I can make the money over here. Over in Italy, I couldn't make the money.

INTERVIEWER: After you were here for two years, you got married. Who was the head of the household?

INTERVIEWEE: When I marry my first husband, he already owned this house. So he was the boss. He was here twelve years before me. He was a taylor.

INTERVIEWER: Who managed the money?

INTERVIEWEE: He handed the money over to me. Everything was home made. There was no markets like they have now. We grow even a pig in the back yard. We had a little garden. The money went to the mortgage on the house, \$2,000.00.

INTERVIEWER: Do you speak Italian to your children?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I speak Italian to them. Now everybody is married and they don't speak it anymore. They still understand it. I speak like I do you so everybody understand.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel bad your grandchildren don't speak Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: When my grandchildren were small, they understood. Now, they are with their mothers all the time, they don't understand me anymore. I don't feel bad because I know when I speak, they understand. I can't speak very good, but I make you understand.

INTERVIEWER: What was the work like factory?

INTERVIEWEE: I made elastic near Davis Park, Admiral Street. I worked there for ten years.

INTERVIEWER: Is religion important to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I am baptized.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the Italian traditions?

INTERVIEWEE: We have a lot of special times. We have the fish on Christmas. Every holiday is different.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any kind of prejudices when you worked? Did anybody not like you because you were Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: No, because where I worked they were all kinds; there were French, Polish, Italian, Portugese, and Jewish. We all worked together and then we have lunch together. Someday you may have a apple, and I have a bannana. One day you give me the apple and I give you the bannana. We would sit outside on the grass. We had an hour and half for lunch. I knew three or four girls and we play. The boss would smoke a cigar in the office and me and the other girls push each other in a carriage. We enjoy the time. Sometime the boss would see but they make believe they don't see us. After they come and see Angelina, you give a ride to Rosa like a machina. And I say no sir, I know I have to work. We were eithteen, tweentyone, seven-teen and twenty-three.

We start at 7:30 in the morning and come home 5:30. We have one hour and half for sleep or rest.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet your husband?

INTERVIEWEE: I had a girlfriend named Albina, we worked together. She introduced me to her cousin because he wanted to marry an Italian girl. I had four children, she had three sons and one daughter. When my husband died, he was only forty-two. Albina died a year previously. Then I marry Albina's husband. I then had one daughter. I had to marry the second time because four children were all small.